

Strategic Models of Politics

PS 231, Spring 2012

Instructor: Professor Milan Svolik, Department of Political Science

Lectures: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 12:30-1:50 p.m., Gregory Hall 223

Office Hours: Fridays, 3-5 p.m. and by appointment

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Course Web Page: <http://compass.illinois.edu>

Midterm Exam: TBD, *Final Exam:* TBD, *No class on:* TBD

Description: This class introduces students to strategic models of political behavior and their implications for our understanding of politics. We will first examine several foundational topics in formal political theory, game theory, and social choice theory. We will then use insights from game theory and social choice theory to address major political questions, including: How do candidates choose platforms? How do voters hold politicians accountable? Why are common resources overexploited? Why do countries fight wars?

Prerequisites: An effective presentation and application of key ideas from game theory and social choice theory requires their formalization, i.e. the use algebra, graphs, and tables. However, none of the material in this class will require mathematics beyond basic high-school algebra.

Course Requirements: Students are required to attend classes, read the assigned material, and discuss assigned research articles. The final grade will be composed as follows: class participation and discussion of the assigned article 10%, problem sets 30%, midterm 30%, and final 30%. Class participation includes a (joint) presentation on assigned discussion article (including a few presentation slides) and regular summary/discussion of assigned

discussion readings on Compass.

Attendance: Regular attendance is required. Notify me in advance if you will be absent.

The University's official policy on absences is at

http://admin.illinois.edu/policy/code/article1_part5_1-501.html.

Email summaries: I will ask you to submit a two-paragraph summary/discussion of the readings assigned for each meeting to "Discussions" at Compass by 11am on the day of the class (not necessarily two paragraphs per reading, just two paragraphs for all the readings assigned for a meeting). The purpose of these summaries is to facilitate your preparation for the class and encourage you to participate in class discussion. You can also use these summaries as an opportunity to provide feedback on the assigned readings.

Class presentation: An important part of your participation requirement will be to present (jointly with several other students) a research article of your choice (from the discussion readings listed below.) Please also prepare (as a group) a few presentation slides. You can email your slides to me (or bring them to class on a memory key).

In-class behavior: All cell phones and related devices must be turned off during class and stowed away. Laptop computers can be used only for class purposes, with the internet connection turned off.

Readings: I will base several lectures on the following textbook, I recommend that you buy it:

Shepsle, Kenneth A. and Bonchek, Mark S. 1997. *Analyzing Politics: Rationality, Behavior, and Institutions*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Some lectures will be based on a few chapters from the following textbook, but this one is not a required reading:

Osborne, Martin J. 2004. *An Introduction to Game Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

You can order both books online; both have been placed on reserve at the library. All discussion readings are posted on Compass.

Course Outline:

Below is a list of topics that we will cover; we will adjust pace as we go. (★) denotes a discussion reading.

Rational Choice in Politics

Concepts: Rational Choice, Preferences

Chapters 1-2 in [Shepsle and Bonchek \(1997\)](#).

Recommended: Chapter 1 in [Osborne \(2004\)](#).

(★) Atran, Scott. 2003. Genesis of suicide terrorism. *Science*, 299:1534–1539.

(★) Kalyvas, Stathis. 1999. Wanton and senseless? The logic of massacres in Algeria. *Rationality and Society*.

(★) Chapters Introduction and 1-2 in Caplan, Bryan. 2007. *The Myth of the Rational Voter*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

(★) Leeson, Peter T. 2010. Pirational choice: The economics of infamous pirate practices. *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, 76:497510.

Strategic Games

Concepts: Games in Normal Form, Best Response Function, Nash Equilibrium

Recommended: Chapter 2 in [Osborne \(2004\)](#).

Illustration: Classic Games in Politics

- (★) Chapter 6, “Prisoner’s Dilemma,” in Poundstone, William. 1992. *Prisoner’s Dilemma*. New York: Anchor Books.
- (★) Chapter 1, “The Stag Hunt,” in Skyrms, Brian. 2004. *The stag hunt and the evolution of social structure*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- (★) McAdams, Richard H. 2009. Beyond the prisoner’s dilemma: Coordination, game theory, and law. *Southern California Law Review*, 82:173.
- (★) Jervis, Robert. 1978. Cooperation under the security dilemma. *World Politics*, 30(2):167–214.
- (★) Chapter 3, “Constitutionalism: Contract or Coordination?” in Hardin, Russell. 2003. *Liberalism, constitutionalism, and Democracy*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Illustration: Electoral Competition

Pages 104-115 in [Shepsle and Bonchek \(1997\)](#).

Recommended: Section 3.3 in [Osborne \(2004\)](#).

Illustration: The Tragedy of the Commons

Chapters 9-10 in [Shepsle and Bonchek \(1997\)](#).

Hardin, Garrett. 1968. The tragedy of the commons. *Science*, 162(3859):1243–48.

- (★) Chapter 2 in Diamond, Jared M. 2005. *Collapse: How societies choose to fail or succeed*. New York: Viking.
- (★) Chapters 1-3 in Ostrom, Elinor. 1990. *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Choice, Strategy, and Uncertainty

Concepts: Choice under Uncertainty, Expected Utility, Zero-Sum Games, Mixed Strategies

Recommended: Chapter 4 in [Osborne \(2004\)](#).

Illustration: Operation Overlord

Extensive Games

Concepts: Extensive Games, Subgame Perfect Equilibrium, Bargaining

Recommended: Chapter 5 in [Osborne \(2004\)](#).

Illustration: Agenda Control, Strategic Voting, and Electoral Systems

Chapters 6-7 and pp. 115-133 in [Shepsle and Bonchek \(1997\)](#).

Recommended: Section 6.1 in [Osborne \(2004\)](#).

(★) Chapters 3 and 11 in [Riker \(1986\)](#).

Illustration: Brinkmanship and the Cuban Missile Crisis

(★) Chapter 2, 4, and 6 in Allison, Graham and Zelikow, Philip. 1999. *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*. New York: Longman.

(★) Chapter 3 in Schelling, Thomas C. 1966. *Arms and Influence*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Chapter 13 in Dixit, Avinash and Skeath, Susan. 1999. *Games of Strategy*. New York: Norton.

Illustration: Bargaining and War

Recommended: Section 6.1 in [Osborne \(2004\)](#).

- (★) Fearon, James D. 1995. Rationalist Explanations for War. *International Organization*, 49(3):379–414.

Cooperation and the Shadow of the Future

Concepts: Repeated Games, Cooperation under Anarchy

Chapter 8 in [Shepsle and Bonchek \(1997\)](#).

- (★) Chapters 1,2, and 4 in Axelrod, Robert. 1984. *The Evolution of Cooperation*. New York: Basic Books.

- (★) Nowak, Martin A. 2006. Five rules for the evolution of cooperation. *Science*, 314:1560–1563

Collective Choice

Concepts: Social Choice, Arrow's Paradox, Spatial Models

Chapters 3-5 in [Shepsle and Bonchek \(1997\)](#).

Chapter 5, “The Meaning of Social Choices,” in Riker, William H. 1988. *Liberalism against populism*. Long Grove: Waveland Press.